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SUBJECT: SPANISH GOVERNMENT DRUMS UP SUPPORT FOR
AFGHANISTAN MISSION

REF: KABUL 2214

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Citing barely 50 percent public approval for Spanish participation in ISAF, the GOS took the offensive on May 18, holding a high visibility public discussion of its efforts in Afghanistan. GOS speakers, including the Defense and Foreign Ministers, hammered on several key justifications: the UN and NATO mandates for ISAF, the support of the Afghan people for an international presence, the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, and the threats that Afghan narcotics and/or a failed Afghan state pose to the international community. They also spoke frequently about the co-dependent relationship between security and reconstruction, and the need to include both troops and civilians in the reconstruction. The Afghan Defense Minister emphasized that his country wants to maintain long-term international participation in security and reconstruction efforts until his government and security forces are strong enough to stand alone. He also noted the need to eliminate caveats and to allow field commanders to move troops quickly.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On May 18, the GOS sponsored a made-for-TV seminar titled Spain in Afghanistan. Participants included Spanish and Afghan Defense Ministers, the Spanish Foreign Minister, the Afghan Deputy FM, Afghan Minister of Education, Afghan and Spanish parliamentarians, representatives of international organizations, and academics. A VIP dinner the night before featured NATO Supreme Commander General Jones. Foreign Minister Moratinos and Defense Minister Alonso published an opinion piece titled "The Challenge of Security and Development" explaining Spain's presence in Afghanistan in the conservative daily ABC on May 18. In the article, they said that Spain is working in Afghanistan because of both moral obligation and its own security concerns.

¶3. (U) In his opening remarks, Alonso emphasized that development and reconstruction projects are impossible at this point without troops to provide security. He reviewed Spain's participation in Afghanistan, beginning with Spain's troop contribution to Operation Enduring Freedom in 2001 (under the previous government) and continuing through the shift to the UN-mandated, NATO-operated ISAF. He discussed Spanish support for Afghanistan's elections, leadership of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and Forward Support base (FSB), and financial contributions, most recently its London Conference pledge of 150 million euros over five years. Alonso said that the GOS has been publicly open and honest about why and how Spain is involved in Afghanistan, noting that the Parliament has voted on the mission seven times, most recently last week when it approved a 25 percent increase in force size.

¶4. (U) Foreign Minister Moratinos stressed the wide international and Afghan support for the ISAF mission. He

talked about the reasons for deploying linked civilian and military teams that reinforce each other's work. He said that while Spain's PRT has been functioning for less than a year, the contractors, soldiers, and Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECI) specialists are already making progress on their health, water, and road projects. Moratinos noted that Afghan President Karzai applauded Spain's efforts when he recently visited the PRT. He also said that Karzai told him that the Afghan people support and appreciate international efforts like Spain's.

15. (U) Afghan Defense Minister Raheem Wardak reiterated many of Alonso and Moratinos' points about the international and domestic Afghan legitimacy of the ISAF and OEF missions. He thanked Spain for its military and financial contributions, and honored the Spanish troops who died in two Afghanistan-related aircraft crashes. Wardak also talked about the success story that the Afghan National Army (ANA) has become as an able fighting force under elected civilian control. He said that the Afghan National Police (ANP) is beginning to reform based on the model of the ANA. Wardak said that the ANA and ANP are already developing local intelligence that they share with ISAF, and noted the importance of putting international "mentors" with ANA units. He also mentioned caveats and national restrictions, asking explicitly that countries like Spain give their field commanders the ability to move troops where they are most needed. Later in the seminar, he made the strong point that the Afghan people are very experienced with occupying forces, from Alexander the Great to the Soviet Union, and they do not/not consider ISAF to be an occupying force.

16. (U) The final headliner, Afghan Deputy Foreign Minister Zalmay Aziz, called ISAF's work in Afghanistan a long-term

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project. He pointed out that there are already some successes, like a parliament that has a higher percentage of women members (28%) than the British House of Commons or the US Congress. He compared this to the situation just a few years ago when Afghan women were under virtual house arrest. Aziz said that Afghanistan has signed strategic partnerships with countries like the US, and called on Spain to support its bid for a special partnership with NATO.

17. (U) Other GOS participants expanded on the previously presented themes. MFA Political Director Rafael Dezcallar pointed out that Spain has felt the effects of both illegal drugs and radical terrorism. He said that in the absence of international support, Afghanistan is a source of both. He reported that President Karzai had explicitly asked FM Moratinos to keep Spain focused on western Afghanistan, even as other ISAF efforts move towards the south and east. Dezcallar also set Spain's contributions to Afghanistan in the wider context of Spain's efforts to reach out to the middle east via the Alliance of Civilizations as well the GOS's recent focus on Asia, which traditionally has not been a major Spanish interest.

18. (U) MOD Policy Director Francisco Torrente emphasized that Spain's presence in Afghanistan started under the previous administration. Chief of Defense General Felix Sanz said that ISAF is the most important NATO mission and can't be allowed to fail, but he also mentioned the extent to which the Afghanistan mission has shown weaknesses in NATO's force generation process. Sanz said that Spain's troops have been tested and have responded well. He acknowledged that Spain still has a caveat (preventing the use of lethal force against escaping prisoners) and said that General Jones had addressed the need to get rid of caveats in his keynote the night before.

19. (U) AECI Secretary General (U/S equivalent) Juan Pablo de Laiglesia told conference participants that his agency would disburse 50 million euros of Spain's 150 million euro London Conference pledge. AECI will spend 10 million euros during

each of the next five years, starting with 2006. He said that AECI's priority sectors for 2006 moneys were: (1) clean drinking water; (2) health-related projects; and (3) road building. Among these projects, the road projects would include constructing the 57 kilometer portion of the Afghan Ring Road that rests inside Bagdhis Province and a major bridge at kilometer 0 of that Ring Road. Turning to spending priorities for the 40 million euros AECI will disburse in annual allotments of 10 million euros in 2007 - 2010, de Laiglesia said Spain planned to focus on: (1) gender programs; (2) institutional Development; and (3) rural development. De Laiglesia closed by noting that all these programs are designed to fulfill the commitments Spain undertook in London in late January. He said that it was agreed to in London that foreign assistance should be predictable, should provide institutional support, and should increase local human capacity. AECI's 2006-10 programs would address all three of these areas.

¶10. (U) Spanish NATO PermRep Pablo Benavides complained that no Spanish general has served in the ISAF headquarters staff even though Spain is one of the top troop contributor. He called on the US to remain a strong participant in both NATO and Afghanistan, and said that Spain took responsibility for its PRT in part because the US has a PRT in the same zone. Benavides discouraged comparisons of OEF and ISAF, saying that they complement and support each other. Benavides made a point of stressing the importance of the US role/presence in Afghanistan.

-- COMMENT --

¶11. (SBU) The GOS clearly decided to put on a strong public performance to reiterate the reasons for Spaniards to accept the country's involvement in Afghanistan. At least among the chattering classes, this should focus attention and thus make the conference worthwhile. With both major parties supporting the troop presence (though the opposition Popular Party has questioned deployment decisions in an effort to make political points against the government) and a 150 million euro, five-year financial commitment, Spain seeking to make clear it wants to remain a player in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. Embassy is following up with the Spanish MOD on the caveat issue. On reconstruction, we have invited Spanish Ambassador to Afghanistan Turpin, also present at the conference, for a meeting with our Charge next week to discuss Ring Road funding, per Ambassador Neumann's request in ref A.
MANZANARES